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ABSTRACT

Presented are findings from a research project on marital and family processes and parenting practices during early remarriage and their relationships to children's behavioral adjustment. Participants were 31 stepfather families and 33 nondivorced families, all of which had a target child between 6 and 9 years of age. Stepfamilies had been married for a period ranging from 4 to 7 months. No differences between stepfamilies and nuclear families were found on self-report measures of marital adjustment. However, observations of marital interactions indicated that stepfamily couples were more negative and coercive and exhibited poorer communication skills than nondivorced couples. Overall, boys' and girls' behavioral problems in stepfamilies were associated with more negative family processes and less effective parenting practices. Results indicated that better marital adjustment is more likely to occur in stepfamilies with girls, but be more important for the behavioral adjustment of boys in stepfamilies. Thus, couples at this early stage could perhaps benefit from training to improve their marital skills. (Author/RH)

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Parenting Practices and Family Process During Early Remarriage

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Parenting Practices and Family Process During Early Remarriage

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from the *Developmental Issues in StepFamilies (DIS) Research Project* on marital and family process and parenting practices during early remarriage and relationships to children's behavioral adjustment. Thirty-one stepfather families and thirty-three nondivorced families were studied. All families had a target child between six and nine years old and the stepfamilies were married between four and seven months. No differences between stepfamilies and nuclear families were found on self-report measures of marital adjustment. However, observations of marital interactions indicated that stepfamily couples were more negative and coercive and exhibited poorer communication skills than nondivorced couples. Observations also indicated that stepfamilies had more negative moods, exhibited poorer communication skills and had less effective parenting practices than nondivorced families. Expression of affection, less effective parenting practices, and more dysfunctional family processes were significantly related to children's behavioral adjustment in stepfamilies.

Introduction

The process of marriage and family life has changed dramatically during the past two decades in the United States. This change is the result of two social trends. The first trend is the exponential rise in the divorce rate. The second, less examined trend, is the remarriage pattern of divorced adults. Estimates are that 80 percent of divorced women and 83 percent of divorced men will remarry, one-half within three years post-divorce (Cherlin, 1981; Furstenberg & Spanier, 1984) .

Remarriage, like divorce, involves a complex series of changes which can affect parent-child relationships, parenting effectiveness or styles, family conflict, family income, residence, extended family relationships, and peer relationships. These changes can be stressful and may produce both short term crises and long term effects on individual family members (Bray, in press; Ganong & Coleman, 1984; Hetherington & Camara, 1984). However, the processes and organization of stepfamilies, stepfamily relationships, and the outcomes for members of stepfamilies are not clearly understood because of the dearth of empirical research on remarried families. No published studies have examined the changes that occur in stepfamilies as the couple forms the marital bond and develops a co-parental relationship during the first year of remarriage.

This paper presents findings from the *Developmental Issues in Stepfamilies (DIS) Research Project.* The DIS project is studying family process in stepfather families and first marriage families and the effects of living in a stepfamily over the first five years of stepfamily formation. This paper will focus on family and marital relationships during early (4-8 months) remarriage.

Research on Stepfather Families

Research on stepfamilies is limited, both in volume and because of methodological shortcomings of the research. We will focus the review on research related to family process and relationships in stepfather families.

Marital Satisfaction. While several studies have found that couples in their first marriage report higher marital satisfaction than remarried couples, (Glenn & Weaver, 1977; Renne, 1970; White, 1979), other studies have found no differences in marital satisfaction (Demaris, 1984; Pink & Wampler, 1985). The differences noted in marital satisfaction between first marriages and second marriages were statistically significant, but were not substantially different. Santrock, Warshak, and Elliott (1982) reported that mothers and stepfathers of boys (ages 6 - 11) had less marital conflict than parents in either intact families with boys or stepfather families with girls. Pink and Wampler (1985) compared nondivorced families with stepfather families and found that the gender of the adolescent stepchild had no effect on marital satisfaction. Overall, these studies indicate that marital satisfaction in stepfather families may be influenced by a variety of factors, however, the process and relationship skills of newly remarried couples has not been fully examined by researchers.

Parent-Child Relationships. Studies that investigated the relationships between parents and children in stepfamilies have reported inconsistent findings. Clingempeel, Ievoli, and Brand (1984b) found no differences in stepfather-stepchild relationships in simple and complex stepfamilies. (A *simple* stepfather family is when the stepfather has no children from a former marriage and a *complex* stepfamily is when the stepfather has children from a former marriage who do not live with him.) Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1982) found that adults in *complex* stepfamilies reported more conflict over childrearing and parenting issues. The differences in these studies may be best explained by methodological differences between the two studies. Clingempeel, et al. looked at behavioral observations of parent-child interactions and self-reports of those relationships, while Hetherington, et al. looked at broader parenting issues, such as parenting roles and styles.

Hetherington, et al. (1982) stated that the most successful stepfathers, during the first two years of remarriage, developed warm, involved, and communicative relationships with their stepchildren. Successful stepfathers did not attempt to take over the family system and were described as neither detached nor immediately over-involved. Instead of trying to establish new and possibly conflicting expectations, rules, and discipline practices; successful stepfathers were supportive of the custodial mother, yet were not afraid to set appropriate limits for children. Similar findings were found in the DIS research project (Bray, in press) for stepfather families during the first year of remarriage. While not controlling for time since remarriage, Santrock, Warshak, Lindberg, and Meadows (1982b) found that boys in stepfather families showed more socially competent behavior than boys in intact families. Boy's social competence in stepfamilies was related to the more competent parenting practices observed in both mothers and stepfathers, which was described as more authoritative, less permissive, and with more parental control. Although stepfathers did not appear to behave differently with stepdaughters than with stepsons, girls in stepfamilies expressed less warmth in this relationship than boys. Girls in stepfamilies were more anxious than girls in intact families and demonstrated more anger towards their remarried mothers. Consistent with these findings, Clingempeel, et al. (1984a,b) reported that girls evidenced a lower proportion of positive verbal and a greater proportion of negative problem solving behaviors toward their stepfathers than did boys. Also, stepfathers in this study did not appear to differ in the manner in which they behaved toward their stepsons or stepdaughters.

The hypothesis that the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship is more problematic beyond the early months of family formation is supported by two studies. Clingempeel and Segal (1986) found that the length of time living in a stepfather family was associated with more positive perceptions of the stepfather-child relationship for boys, ages 9-12 years, but not for girls. Similarly, Pink and Wampler (1985) found that stepfathers and both sex adolescent children reported negative perceptions of their parent-child relationships. Girls in stepfamilies had the most negative perceptions. In addition, the amount of time living in the stepfamily was not positively related to the perceptions of either stepfathers or stepchildren. Stepchildren saw themselves similarly to children in nondivorced families, although stepfathers' indicated that they initiated more hostile communication than fathers in nondivorced families. These studies suggest that the stepfather/stepchild relationship may be affected by the gender of the child, relationship skills of both parents and child, the parental style that the stepfather develops during early remarriage, and the support given to the custodial parent, rather than simply the length of time living in the stepfather family.

Pink and Wampler (1985) also found no differences in the biological mother/child relationships between nondivorced and remarried stepfather families. The relationships were described as positive for children of both sexes in stepfather families. However, Anderson and White (1986) indicated that biological mothers and children formed a coalition in nonclinical stepfather families which was not evident in functional nondivorced families. In this study, clinical stepfamilies were distinguished from nonclinical stepfamilies by both the intensity of this mother/child coalition and the negative, distant and nonreciprocal stepfather/stepchild relationships. The sex of the child did not affect these outcomes.

The literature suggests that there are a myriad of factors that affect the stepfamily in formation. The problem with many studies in this area is that they did not consider the complexity of stepfamily relationships. The family processes which lead to successful outcomes for children in stepfamilies need to be identified.

Developmental Issues in StepFamilies Research Project

The Developmental Issues in StepFamilies (DIS) research project is investigating the relationship of family structure, family process, and adult/child psychosocial variables in stepfather families and nondivorced families across the first five years of remarriage. To determine developmental changes in family organization and process during this period, stepfather families at six-months, two and one-half years and five years after remarriage are being studied. The research is focusing on the impact of family organization and process on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children ages six to thirteen. The time periods following remarriage and ages of the children were selected to control for the length of time in a stepfamily. Previous research on stepfamilies has not controlled time since remarriage and as pointed out by Ganong and Coleman (1984), this is a very important variable in stepfamily adjustment. Boys and girls are investigated to determine sex differences in response to specific family relationships, such as mother-son or stepfather-stepdaughter. A multimethod-multimeasure design using structured interviews, self-reports, and standardized tests from family members and behavioral ratings of family interactions are the outcome criteria. In addition, self-report data concerning the relationships between the target children and their teachers, non-custodial parents, and grandparents are also collected to obtain a picture of the multi-generational family system.

Family Process in Early Remarriage. The DIS project is currently investigating the six-month stepfamily and nondivorced, control groups to study the early transitional issues, changes, and family process that occur in remarriage. Three tasks are central to the formation of the new stepfamily: (1) the formation of a strong marital bond, (2) development and integration of the stepparent into the parenting role, and (3) creating workable relationships with the noncustodial parent. This paper reports data from the DIS project on the first two tasks by describing marital and family relationship patterns and processes using a multimethod design.

Method

Sample: The results presented herein are based on a sample of 64 families. The families were recruited from many sources. These included letters sent home to all children in four suburban school districts, letters to local parent groups, athletic teams, posters in local stores and neighborhood centers, referrals from local clergy and advertisements from local media. Those selected were the ones that met our criteria of a white, middle-class sample, parents age less than 45, no more than four children living in the home, at least a high school education for parents, and no history of psychological or psychiatric problems for the target child. In this way we are studying nonclinical families and children with a "normal" developmental history. Nondivorced families were selected to match the characteristics of the stepfather families.

The sample includes 31 stepfather families, 16 with a girl and 15 with a boy. There are 33 nondivorced families, 18 families with a girl and 15 families with a boy. All children were between the ages of 6 and 9 years old (Mean age = 7.1). The stepfather families were remarried between 4 and 8 months at the time of participation and nondivorced families were married an average of 12.9 years at the time of participation. Mothers in stepfamilies had an average age of 30.6 years and 13.9 years of education; stepfathers had an average age of 31.3 years and 15.2 years of education. For nondivorced families, mothers had an average age of 33 years and 14.7 years of education; fathers had an average age of 35 years and 16.2 years of education. All families were white, middle-class with a modal income for stepfamilies of $33,000 and for nondivorced families $37,000. The stepfamily mother's first marriage lasted an average of 7.9 years. The average time between separation and divorce for the first marriage was 9.3 months and between divorce and remarriage was 2.7 years.

Procedures and Measures: All families completed a structured interview designed by Hetherington and Clingempeel (1983) for their study on adaptation to remarriage. This interview was modified to meet the time requirements of our study and for our age group. In addition, standardized measures, tests, and videotapes of structured interactions were obtained. The data were collected in the family's home during two home visits each lasting about 3 to 3 1/2-hours. The home visits were 7 to 14 days apart. The adults were interviewed by one research assistant while the target child was

interviewed separately by a second research assistant. Additional questionnaires were self-administered during the period between home visits.

Parent Interview Scales: Parents were interviewed separately on a structured interview schedule. Scales measuring childrearing issues (discipline methods, conflict over rules), expression of affection, and assessment of child monitoring (parental monitoring of children's behavior, parental control of children's behavior) are presented in this paper. Additional scales were completed, but are not reported in this paper. A research assistant presented each parent with the scales and the parent answered them without consultation from the other parent. The research assistant answered any questions that the parent had regarding the questions, but did not make any ratings.

Child Interview Scales: Children were also interviewed separately on a structured interview schedule covering many of the same topics as the parents. Scales measuring childrearing issues (discipline methods, conflict over rules), expression of affection, and assessment of child monitoring (parental control of children's behavior) are presented in this paper. A research assistant read the interview questions and potential answers to the child and recorded the child's responses. The research assistant did not make any ratings for the child.

Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976): This scale measures marital and other dyadic adjustment and satisfaction. It offers a total dyadic adjustment score which has very good reliability and validity (Spanier, 1976). Higher scores indicate better dyadic adjustment and satisfaction.

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983): The CBCL was used as a measure of behavioral adjustment for children. The CBCL yields two broad-band scales, Internalizing and Externalizing behaviors, and a total behavior scale. The Internalizing and Externalizing scales are T-scores adjusted for sex and age norms. The total scale is a raw score.

Global Family Coding System (GFCS; Hetherington, Clingempeel, & Eisenberg, 1984): The GFCS is a behavioral rating system designed for Hetherington and Clingempeel's (1983) study on adaptation to remarriage. The ratings are on a variety of dimensions identified as important family processes from the child development and family studies literature (Baumrind, 1971; Hetherington, et al., 1982; Patterson, 1982; Santrock et al., 1982). The ratings include six interaction process dimensions; hostility, nurturance, mood, coercion, communication skills, self-disclosure; and three parenting style dimensions; authoritative, authoritarian, permissive. The ratings are based on overall judgements of family functioning on a given dimension and not on a behavior by behavior analysis. Dimensions are rated on a 1 to 5 scale. Larger scores mean more hostility, nurturance, coercion, self-disclosure, more positive moods, and better communication skills. Larger scores on the parenting styles indicate that they are more authoritative, authoritarian, or permissive. Furthermore, each global scale is coded independently, although there is an assumed correlation between the constructs.

Each dyadic relationship is rated on the six interaction dimensions from the perspective of each individual, e.g, mother to child, child to mother, etc. Only parents are rated on the parenting styles. For the purposes of this paper the individual dimensions were summed across all relevant persons to produce family ratings on the six process codes and parental ratings on the three parenting style codes. The summed scores are used because of the family systems conceptualization employed, so that the ratings will correspond with the self-reports of overall family functioning, and to have more reliable measures of family process. Analyses were conducted on the separate dyadic ratings, but will only be presented to interpret and discuss the overall findings.

Coders. A total of 13 people served as coders for the project. This included 12 psychology undergraduates and 1 graduate student. The coders were trained according to the GFCS manual until they were reliable on each dimension. They were blind to the hypotheses under study.

Source of data and coding procedures. The families were videotaped in their homes on two separate occassions. The videotaped segments were of six structured interaction tasks between various combinations of the mother, father or stepfather, and target child. The discussions were of planning a family trip together (couple and triad) and discussion of family problems (triad and three dyads). The problems discussed were identified through responses on several of the questionnaires. Each segment was approximately 10 minutes in length for a total of at about 60 minutes. Three of the segments were recorded during the first home visit and the other three were recorded during the second home visit.

The coder viewed the entire videotape making notes about specific interaction processes and subject pairings. After viewing the tape the coder rated each of the persons on the GFCS dimensions.

Fifty percent of the tapes were coded by a second coder for reliablity purposes. The reliabilities ranged from .66 to .87 with a mean reliability of .77 for the eleven scales.

Data Analysis: Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) and analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted in a 2 X 2, Family Type by Child's Sex, design for all of the outcome variables (Bray & Maxwell, 1985). Planned apriori comparisons were also conducted to look at specific differences between boys and girls within and between family types. These comparisons are based on the current status of the literature indicating consistent differences between boys and girls reactions to divorce and remarriage (Hetherington & Camara, 1984).

Results and Discussion

Marital and Family Process

There were no significant differences in marital adjustment and satisfaction between stepfamilies and nondivorced families on either mothers' or fathers' reports (See Table 1). However, adults in stepfamilies with girls reported significantly higher marital adjustment and satisfaction than adults in stepfamilies with boys. While it was expected that newly remarried couples may rate themselves as more satisfied and adjusted than nondivorced families because of a "honeymoon effect," this did not occur. However, both groups' mean scores were within the non-clinical range (Spanier, 1976).

Insert Table 1 About Here

Although these findings are essentially equivalent to those reported by Demaris (1974) for marital satisfaction in first and second marriages, they differ from other research findings which found that people in first marriages report higher marital satisfaction than people in second marriages (Glenn & Weaver, 1977; Renne, 1970; White, 1979). Prior research did not control for the length of time remarried. These discrepancies may reflect the failure to control for the developmental aspects of remarriage. The lack of differences between family groups may also be due to the decreased level of marital satisfaction found in families with children as compared to families without children (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Rollins & Cannon, 1974). The "instantly formed" stepfamily with children puts additional stress and role strain on the parents (Bray, in press) which may influence their level of marital adjustment and satisfaction.

Observations of Family Interactions. A two-way MANOVA on the six family process dimensions yielded main effects for family type, Multivariate $F(6, 51) = 1.96$, $p < .08$. There were no significant interactions or main effects for sex of child found in the comparisons. A priori comparisons were also conducted to investigate differences between family types and sex of child. Nondivorced families were rated as having more positive moods and better communication skills than stepfather families (See Table 2). In addition, interpersonal interactions in stepfamilies were observed to be more coercive than in nondivorced families.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Recall that these overall family ratings are based on separate dyadic ratings for each pair of family members. Analyses of the dyadic data were conducted to further understand the differences in family interaction patterns. Husbands and wives in stepfamilies exhibited a more negative mood and had poorer communication skills than couples in nondivorced families. Husbands in stepfamilies were more coercive towards their wives than were husbands in nondivorced families, particularly in families with boys. This is in contrast to their self-ratings of marital adjustment. Remarried couples were less effective than nondivorced couples in skills identified by marital researchers as important for a successful marriage (Jacobson & Margolin, 1979; Vincent, Weiss, & Birchler, 1975). The poorer marital functioning may be due to the early transition in the marriage, that is, the couples may have not developed as good a repertoire of marital skills at this point in their marriages. However, remarried couples' poorer marital relations may reflect skills deficits that are related to their prior marital problems and divorce.

On the parent to child dimensions, remarried mothers and stepfathers were rated as being more coercive and exhibited more negative moods with their children than mothers and fathers in nondivorced families. Parents in stepfamilies with boys exhibited more negative moods than all other parents. Parents in stepfamilies were also more coercive toward their sons than parents in nondivorced families.

Overall, children in stepfamilies were not rated as behaving differently toward their remarried mothers or stepfathers than children toward their nondivorced biological parents. These results are somewhat surprising given the differences in parent-child relationships reported in the literature (Clingempeel et al., 1984a,b; Hetherington et al., 1985; Santrock et al., 1982b). A possible explanation lies in the fact that the children in this sample are younger and perhaps less active than the older children in previous studies. In addition, Clingempeel and Hetherington used more molecular, or behavior by behavior, coding systems than were used in this study. Thus, the global ratings may not be as sensitive to differences in child-parent relationships as Clingempeel's and Hetherington's molecular coding systems.

Parenting Practices

A two-way MANOVA on the childrearing variables of conflict concerning rules and discipline methods revealed differences between family types, Multivariate $F(12, 49) = 2.23$, $p < .025$. Mothers in stepfamilies and stepfathers reported significantly more conflict with children concerning rules than did parents in nondivorced families. In addition, children in stepfamilies reported signficantly more conflict over rules with their stepfathers than did children with their biological fathers. Mothers in stepfamilies also reported significantly more conflict with their remarried husbands over parent-child rules and issues than did mothers in nondivorced families, $F(1, 60) = 2.90$, $p < .04$.

A two-way MANOVA on the expression of affection variables revealed differences between family types, Multivariate $F(8, 53) = 3.81$, $p < .001$. Mothers in stepfamilies and stepfathers reported expressing significantly less affection toward their children than did parents in nondivorced families. Simple effects tests indicated that the differences were primarily for boys in stepfamilies, but stepfathers also reported giving less affection toward their stepdaughters than did fathers toward their daughters. However, boys in stepfamilies reported that they received more affection from their mothers than did boys in nondivorced families, while girls in stepfamilies reported receiving more affection from their mothers than did boys in stepfamilies.

A two-way MANOVA on the assessment of child monitoring variables revealed differences between family types, Multivariate $F(8, 53) = 2.17$, $p < .05$. Mothers and fathers in nondivorced families reported that they monitored their children's behavior more than parent's in stepfamilies. Tests of simple effects indicated that the differences in parent's monitoring were primarily around boy's behavior and not girls. Fathers in nondivorced families also reported that they and their spouses also provided more parental control (again primarily for boys) than stepfathers. However, girls in stepfamilies reported that they are monitored significantly more by their mothers than boys in stepfamilies are monitored by their mothers. No other differences were found between boys and girls.

Observations of Parenting Practices. A two-way MANOVA on the three parenting styles yielded main effects for family type, Multivariate $F(6, 31) = 3.65$, $p < .018$. There were no significant interactions or main effects for sex of child found in the comparisons. Parents in nondivorced families were rated as having a significantly more authoritative parenting style than parents in stepfamilies, whereas parents in stepfamilies had more authoritarian parenting styles than parents in nondivorced families. Examination of the individual dyads indicates that mothers in stepfamilies were significantly less authoritative, but more authoritarian than mothers in nondivorced families toward their children. This means that the mothers in stepfamilies were more likely to use stern, dogmatic control without explantion of reasons for discipline and not promote independent decision making on the part of their children. Stepfathers were also significantly less authoritative than fathers in nondivorced families toward their children.

The more authoritarian or autocratic parenting by remarried mothers is consistent with previous research on divorced mothers and children (Hetherington, et al, 1978, 1982). Remarried

mothers also had more conflict over rules with their children and husbands, exhibited less affection toward their children, and provided less monitoring and control of their children's behavior than did nondivorced mothers. Stepfathers were rated as less authoritative in parenting and further reported that they have more conflict, give less affection, and provide less monitoring and control to their stepchildren than nondivorced fathers. This parenting style reflects an absence of clear rules and parental authority for the stepfather.

Relationship of Family Process and Parenting Practices to Children's Behavioral Adjustment in Stepfamilies

More behavioral problems for boys in stepfamilies were related to poorer marital adjustment, more punitive discipline practices by mothers and stepfathers, more interparental conflict over rules and childrearing issues, more hostility in the family, more negative moods, and more coercive interactions in the family. In addition, more authoritarian parenting was also correlated with more behavior problems. Expression of affection was related to more behavior problems, but in different ways depending on who did the rating. More behavior problems were associated with *less* affection between parent and child on parental ratings, but more behavior problems were associated with *more* affection between mother and child on boy's ratings.

More behavioral problems for girls in stepfamilies were related to more punitive discipline practices by mothers, more punitive and rational discipline practices by stepfathers, more interparental conflict over rules and childrearing issues, more hostility in the family, and less self-disclosure or intimacy in the family. Parenting styles were not significantly related to girls behavior problems. More behavior problems were associated with girls' ratings of *more* affection between mother or stepfather and child. Parental ratings of affection between parent and child were not associated with behavior problems of girls.

Overall boys' and girls' behavioral problems in stepfamilies were associated with more negative family processes and less effective parenting practices. It appears that most attempts by stepfathers to discipline their stepchildren led to behavior problems at this early stage. Since inconsistent and authoritarian parenting tends to lead to more negative outcomes for children, this finding may point to an area for early intervention. However, these differences may also reflect family processes unique to stepfather families.

Summary and Conclusions

Development of a strong marital bond was identified as a major task for remarried couples. The new couples, six-months post remarriage, reported similar levels of marital satisfaction and adjustment as a group of nondivorced couples who had been married on the average of 12 years. The honeymoon phase either never started for these remarried couples or disappeared within the first six-months. The high levels of stress previously found in these families (Bray, in press) would certainly contribute to less marital satisfaction. However, on the positive side, the lack of differences indicates that these remarried couples feel as satisfied and happy with their current marital relationships as nondivorced couples with similarly aged children.

While these new couples *feel* satisfied with their marriages, some important behavioral differences emerged between the marital groups. Remarried couples were more coercive with each other, expressed more negative moods, and demonstrated communication skills than nondivorced couples. The negative mood and coercive interactional style is a reflection of an inability to communicate directly, assertively express one's desires and needs, and effectively solve relational problems, all of which are important skills for a successful marriage (Jocobson & Margolin, 1979). Formation of a strong marital bond is viewed as essential for successful stepfamily formation and functioning (Visher & Visher, 1979). This study indicates that better marital adjustment is more likely to occur in stepfamilies with girls, but be more important for the behavioral adjustment of boys in stepfamilies. Thus, couples at this early stage could perhaps benefit from some training to improve their marital skills.

Developing effective parenting and parent-child relationships was a second developmental task identified for new stepfamilies. The parenting styles of remarried mothers and stepfathers were

generally less authoritative and more authoritarian. Remarried mothers and stepfathers were also more negative and coercive with their children or stepchildren. These characteristics are consistent with the less effective parenting styles employed. Divorced mothers often become more authoritarian in their parenting, especially with boys, in a single-parent family (Hetherington, et al., 1982). These remarried mothers are perhaps parenting their children as they did as a single-parent and the stepfather has not yet become integrated into the parenting role. Stepfathers parenting styles also reflect a lack of clear rules and consistent enforcement of those rules. This is probably due to several factors, such as lack of agreement on rules, ambivalence or insecurity associated with the early transition as a stepparent. The development of a clear role for the stepfather with appropriate parental authority is a central issue for successful stepfamily formation (Visher & Visher, 1979). These families are obviously in the midst of developing those relationships. It will be interesting to see how this process progresses as we follow these families and compare them to the later stepfamily groups.

These findings point to some interesting areas for further study and suggest areas for clinicians working with stepfamilies to consider. While stepfamilies at this early stage report less expression of affection and more problematic family relationships, these families are certainly capable of functioning within a normal range, although the norm is somewhat different than that of nondivorced families (Bray, in press). These differences can be interpreted as transitions in family formation, but also point to areas which may need some attention.

The divorce statistics indicate that second marriages are at greater risk for dissolution (Cherlin, 1978). Coping with the stresses of parenthood was reported as one of the primary difficulties for stepfamilies in both this study and the Rossen et al. (1985) study. The poorer interpersonal skills in coupling and parenting give some clues as to why these families may be at risk. The less effective interpersonal skills were also associated with more negative outcomes for children in stepfamilies. Since these are correlational findings the causal antecedents need to be identified by future research.

Research identifying successful coping patterns for stepfamilies is needed to help clinicians consult with and treat stepfamilies. Given the higher level of behavior problems reported on these children (Bray, in press) and poorer marital and parenting skills found, later analyses on the older remarried groups will tell us if these deficit areas and problems are transient to family formation or are inherent to stepfather family systems. Analysis of the complete DIS sample with the longer remarried families will help to identify any unique, long-term stressors and the successful coping strategies for stepfamilies. Through this research and other longitudinal studies we will finally be able to document and understand the normal phases of the family life cycle for remarried families.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and F Statistics for Dyadic Adjustment Scale, Childrearing Issues, Expression of Affection, and Assessment of Child Monitoring

	Family Type					
	Nuclear Family		Stepfamily			
	Sex of Child		Sex of Child			
Variable	Males	Females	Males	Females	F(1,60)[a]	p ≤
MDAS	119.6 (13.0)	120.4 (11.4)	112.7 (15.5)	123.6 (8.8)	3.48	.07*
FDAS	115.9 (11.5)	117.2 (7.6)	110.9 (17.8)	120.0 (9.6)	2.94	.09*
MCSCCDR	48.1 (6.8)	50.1 (5.0)	45.9 (9.8)	49.6 (4.9)	.58	.45
MCSCCMI	51.9 (4.8)	54.1 (2.2)	47.3 (8.8)	44.9 (10.3)	14.14	.01
MCSCRAT	28.9 (5.4)	26.7 (7.6)	29.5 (4.1)	29.3 (4.6)	1.24	.27
MCSCPUN	56.3 (7.4)	55.6 (8.3)	56.9 (6.5)	57.6 (4.2)	.59	.44
FCSCCDR	47.7 (4.1)	48.3 (6.8)	49.3 (6.0)	49.2 (4.3)	.83	.36
FCSCCMI	51.9 (5.6)	51.5 (9.4)	47.7 (12.8)	48.2 (6.8)	2.65	.11
FCSCRAT	29.7 (3.6)	30.4 (5.6)	31.3 (3.9)	31.3 (3.1)	1.20	.28
FCSCPUN	58.5 (4.4)	57.4 (8.2)	59.3 (5.1)	59.3 (5.5)	.75	.39
CMCSCCDR	54.8 (15.5)	52.1 (7.0)	52.7 (5.7)	53.8 (6.3)	.07	.79
CMCSCCMI	49.8 (5.9)	52.2 (4.6)	45.5 (8.1)	51.6 (5.6)	2.26	.14
CMCSCRAT	36.9 (4.7)	36.9 (4.0)	37.0 (2.4)	36.9 (3.6)	.01	.95
CMCSCPUN	63.2 (6.0)	64.5 (5.9)	61.3 (5.3)	63.3 (8.0)	.90	.35
CFCSCCDR	57.8 (5.5)	57.3 (7.6)	57.8 (3.9)	54.1 (11.7)	.69	.41
CFCSCCMI	51.3 (5.0)	53.7 (2.9)	47.1 (7.5)	49.6 (9.6)	5.89	.02
CFCSCRAT	37.5 (4.3)	37.9 (4.4)	39.1 (2.5)	38.3 (3.6)	1.02	.32
CFCSCPUN	66.7 (4.3)	65.0 (6.2)	65.3 (5.2)	64.8 (4.2)	.37	.55

Table 1 Continued

MCSSPCC	108.7 (12.3)	113.3 (6.9)	105.5 (13.5)	104.5 (13.2)	4.47	.04
FCSSPCC	104.5 (10.9)	108.8 (13.9)	107.1 (10.4)	105.8 (13.6)	.02	.90
MEXEA	15.8 (6.5)	16.0 (5.5)	21.1 (7.0)	18.4 (5.7)	5.71	.02
MINEA	43.7 (3.7)	43.5 (3.6)	46.7 (3.6)	45.0 (4.1)	5.23	.03
FEXEA	21.6 (6.6)	23.8 (8.2)	28.9 (7.4)	28.5 (6.2)	10.22	.01
FINEA	44.4 (4.3)	46.8 (4.7)	48.9 (4.5)	48.9 (4.4)	7.76	.01
CMEXEA	35.5 (6.2)	31.9 (8.3)	32.7 (6.9)	26.9 (10.7)	3.57	.06
CMINEA	50.4 (5.7)	48.8 (4.6)	50.3 (4.3)	47.1 (7.1)	.44	.51
CFEXEA	35.1 (6.5)	34.5 (7.3)	37.9 (5.0)	34.5 (6.7)	.65	.42
CFINEA	50.4 (5.7)	51.0 (4.3)	52.3 (3.7)	50.8 (5.3)	.44	.51
MACMAS	5.5 (1.6)	5.3 (1.3)	6.3 (1.6)	6.1 (1.1)	5.21	.03
MACMAD	3.9 (.8)	3.6 (.9)	4.5 (1.6)	4.3 (1.9)	3.19	.08
MACMPS	6.2 (2.3)	6.2 (2.4)	7.0 (2.4)	6.9 (1.2)	1.68	.20
MACMPD	4.1 (1.5)	3.9 (1.4)	4.1 (1.9)	4.4 (2.6)	.23	.63
FACMAS	6.7 (1.7)	6.3 (1.7)	9.2 (5.8)	8.1 (2.1)	7.07	.01
FACMAD	4.3 (1.5)	4.1 (1.1)	5.4 (2.5)	4.8 (1.6)	3.92	.05
FACMPS	6.9 (2.1)	7.4 (2.9)	8.4 (2.0)	8.9 (3.4)	4.72	.03
FACMPD	4.2 (1.2)	4.3 (1.7)	5.6 (2.9)	5.6 (3.4)	4.75	.03
CMACMPS	7.3 (2.8)	7.2 (2.5)	10.0 (4.5)	6.8 (2.6)	3.70	.06*
CMACMPD	5.9 (2.5)	4.9 (1.8)	7.0 (2.4)	4.2 (1.9)	10.71	.01*
CFACMPS	9.8 (4.8)	9.1 (4.1)	10.5 (6.2)	8.4 (4.7)	1.04	.31*
CFACMPD	6.8 (2.8)	5.8 (2.8)	6.6 (2.9)	5.2 (2.8)	2.66	.11*

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[a] All *F*s are for main effect of family type, unless otherwise noted. * *F*s for main effect of sex.

*F*s for sex by family type interaction.

Table 1 Continued

Note: M=Mother, F=Father, C=Child, CM=Child to Mother, CF=Child to Father, SR=Self Report, RS=Report on Spouse

DAS: Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Higher scores indicate better marital adjustment)

CSC: Childrearing Issues--Self and Child (Higher scores indicate lower frequencies)

Subscales: CDR=Conflict Daily Routines, CMI=Conflict Maturity Issues, RAT=Rational discipline, PUN=Punitive discipline

CSS: Childrearing Issues--Self and Spouse (Higher scores indicate lower frequencies)

Subscale: PCC=Parent Conflict over issues related to the Child

EA: Expression of Affection (Higher scores indicate less affection)

Subscales: EX=Expressive Affection, IN=Instrumental Affection

ACM: Assessment Child Monitoring (Higher scores indicate less monitoring)

Subscales: AS=Attempted control, Shaping character development; AD=Attempted control, Discourage deviance; PS=Perceived control, Shaping character development; PD=Perceived control, Discourage deviance

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and F Statistics for Global Family Ratings

	Family Type					
	Nuclear Family		Stepfamily			
	Sex of Child		Sex of Child			
Variable	Males	Females	Males	Females	F(1,56)[a]	p≤
Hostility	1.7 (.56)	1.6 (.61)	1.9 (.73)	1.7 (.67)	.62	.43
Nurturance	3.3 (.79)	3.5 (.76)	3.0 (.60)	3.2 (.74)	2.37	.13
Mood	3.4 (.77)	3.7 (.72)	3.1 (.48)	3.3 (.64)	4.46	.04
Coercion	1.6 (.53)	1.7 (.62)	2.1 (.83)	1.8 (.69)	2.91	.09
Communication Skills	3.8 (.72)	4.2 (.60)	3.5 (.49)	3.8 (.80)	3.95	.05
Self-Disclosure	3.1 (.85)	3.5 (.78)	2.9 (.52)	3.2 (.73)	2.72	.11
Parenting Styles:						
Authoritative Parenting						
Style	4.0 (.63)	4.2 (.79)	3.4 (1.0)	3.3 (.87)	10.00	.01
Authoritarian Parenting						
Style	1.6 (.63)	1.8 (.98)	2.1 (.98)	2.4 (1.1)	4.86	.03
Permissive Parenting						
Style	2.1 (1.0)	2.3 (.81)	2.4 (.81)	2.4 (.61)	.68	.41

[a] All *F*s are for main effects of family type.